

Sūrah Al-Qalam

(The Pen)

This Sūrah is Makki. It contains 52 verses and 2 sections

بِسْمِ اللّٰهِ الرَّحْمٰنِ الرَّحِیْمِ

With the name of Allah, the All-Merciful, the Very-Merciful

Verses 1 - 52

نَ وَالْقَلَمِ وَمَا يَسْطُرُونَ ﴿١﴾ مَا أَنْتَ بِمَجْنُونٍ ﴿٢﴾
 وَإِنَّ لَكَ لَأَجْرًا غَيْرَ مَمْنُونٍ ﴿٣﴾ وَأَنْتَ لَعَلَىٰ خُلُقٍ عَظِيمٍ ﴿٤﴾
 فَسَتُبْصِرُ وَيُبْصِرُونَ ﴿٥﴾ بِأَيْسِكُمُ الْمَفْتُونُ ﴿٦﴾ إِنَّ رَبَّكَ هُوَ أَعْلَمُ
 بِمَنْ ضَلَّ عَنْ سَبِيلِهِ ۖ وَهُوَ أَعْلَمُ بِالْمُهْتَدِينَ ﴿٧﴾ فَلَا تُطِعِ
 الْمُكَذِّبِينَ ﴿٨﴾ وَذُؤًا لِّوَيْدِهِنَّ فَيُدْهِنُونَ ﴿٩﴾ وَلَا تُطِعِ كُلَّ
 حَلَّافٍ مَّهِينٍ ﴿١٠﴾ هَمَّازٍ مَّشَاءٍ بِنَمِيمٍ ﴿١١﴾ مَنَّاعٍ لِلْخَيْرِ مُعْتَدٍ
 أَيْمٍ ﴿١٢﴾ عَتَلٍ ۗ بَعْدَ ذَلِكَ زَنِيمٍ ﴿١٣﴾ أَنْ كَانَ ذَا مَالٍ وَنَدِينٍ ﴿١٤﴾
 إِذَا تَتَلَّىٰ عَلَيْهِ الْإِنشَاءَ قَالَ آسَاطِيرُ الْأُولِينَ ﴿١٥﴾ سَنَسِمُهُ عَلَى
 الْخُرطومِ ﴿١٦﴾ إِنَّا بَلَوْنَهُمْ كَمَا بَلَوْنَا أَصْحَابَ الْجَنَّةِ ۖ إِذْ أَقْسَمُوا
 لَيَصْرِمُنَّهَا مُصْبِحِينَ ﴿١٧﴾ وَلَا يَسْتَنْوُونَ ﴿١٨﴾ فَطَافَ عَلَيْهَا
 طَائِفٌ مِّن رَّبِّكَ وَهُمْ نَائِمُونَ ﴿١٩﴾ فَأَصْبَحَتْ كَالصَّرِيمِ ﴿٢٠﴾
 فَتَنَادُوا مُصْبِحِينَ ﴿٢١﴾ أَنْ اغْدُوا عَلَيَّ حَرْثِكُمْ ۖ إِن كُنْتُمْ صَادِقِينَ
 ﴿٢٢﴾ فَانطَلَقُوا وَهُمْ يَخَافَتُونَ ﴿٢٣﴾ أَنْ لَّيَدْخُلَنَّهَا الْيَوْمَ عَلَيْكُمْ

مَسْكِينٌ ﴿٢٤﴾ وَعَدُوا عَلَىٰ حَرٍِّ قَدْرَيْنِ ﴿٢٥﴾ فَلَمَّا رَأَوْهَا قَالُوا إِنَّا
 لَضَالُّونَ ﴿٢٦﴾ بَلْ نَحْنُ مَحْرُومُونَ ﴿٢٧﴾ قَالَ أَوْسَطُهُمْ أَلَمْ أَقُلْ
 لَكُمْ لَوْلَا تُسَبِّحُونَ ﴿٢٨﴾ قَالُوا سُبْحَانَ رَبِّنَا إِنَّا كُنَّا ظَالِمِينَ ﴿٢٩﴾
 فَأَقْبَلَ بَعْضُهُمْ عَلَىٰ بَعْضٍ يَتَلَوْمُونَ ﴿٣٠﴾ قَالُوا يَٰوَيْلَنَا إِنَّا كُنَّا
 ظَالِمِينَ ﴿٣١﴾ عَسَىٰ رَبُّنَا أَنْ يُبَدِّلَنَا خَيْرًا مِنْهَا إِنَّا إِلَىٰ رَبِّنَا رَاغِبُونَ
 ﴿٣٢﴾ كَذَلِكَ الْعَذَابُ ۗ وَالْعَذَابُ الْآخِرَةُ أَكْبَرُ ۗ لَوْ كَانُوا يَعْلَمُونَ
 ﴿٣٣﴾ إِنَّ لِلْمُتَّقِينَ عِنْدَ رَبِّهِمْ جَنَّاتٍ النَّعِيمِ ﴿٣٤﴾ أَفَنَجْعَلُ
 الْمُسْلِمِينَ كَالْمُجْرِمِينَ ﴿٣٥﴾ مَا لَكُمْ نَدَىٰ كَيْفَ تَحْكُمُونَ ﴿٣٦﴾ أَمْ
 لَكُمْ كِتَابٌ فِيهِ تَدْرُسُونَ ﴿٣٧﴾ إِنَّ لَكُمْ فِيهِ لَمَا تَخَيَّرُونَ ﴿٣٨﴾ أَمْ
 لَكُمْ آيْمَانٌ عَلَيْنَا بِالْغَةِ إِلَىٰ يَوْمِ الْقِيَامَةِ ۗ إِنَّ لَكُمْ لَمَا تَحْكُمُونَ
 ﴿٣٩﴾ سَلِّمُوا إِلَيْهِمْ بِذَلِكَ زَعِيمٌ ﴿٤٠﴾ أَمْ لَهُمْ شُرَكَاءُ ۗ فَلْيَأْتُوا
 بِشُرَكَائِهِمْ إِنْ كَانُوا صَادِقِينَ ﴿٤١﴾ يَوْمَ يُكْشَفُ عَنْ سَاقٍ
 وَيُدْعَوْنَ إِلَى السُّجُودِ فَلَا يَسْتَطِيعُونَ ﴿٤٢﴾ خَاشِعَةً أَبْصَارُهُمْ
 تَرْهَقُهُمْ ذِلَّةٌ ۗ وَقَدْ كَانُوا يُدْعَوْنَ إِلَى السُّجُودِ وَهُمْ سَلِيمُونَ ﴿٤٣﴾
 فَذَرْنِي وَمَنْ يُكَذِّبُ بِهَذَا الْحَدِيثِ ۗ سَنَسْتَدْرِجُهُمْ مِنْ حَيْثُ
 لَا يَعْلَمُونَ ﴿٤٤﴾ وَأَمْلِي لَهُمْ ۗ إِنَّ كَيْدِي مَتِينٌ ﴿٤٥﴾ أَمْ تَسْأَلُهُمْ
 أَجْرًا فَهُمْ مِنْ مَّغْرَمٍ مُثْقَلُونَ ﴿٤٦﴾ أَمْ عِنْدَهُمُ الْغَيْبُ فَهُمْ يَكْتُمُونَ
 ﴿٤٧﴾ فَاصْبِرْ لِحُكْمِ رَبِّكَ وَلَا تَكُنْ كَصَاحِبِ الْحُوتِ إِذْ نَادَىٰ
 وَهُوَ مَكْظُومٌ ﴿٤٨﴾ لَوْلَا أَنْ تَدْرَكَهُ نِعْمَةٌ مِّن رَّبِّهِ لَنُبِذَ بِالْعَرَاءِ وَهُوَ
 مَذْمُومٌ ﴿٤٩﴾ فَاجْتَبَاهُ رَبُّهُ فَجَعَلَهُ مِنَ الصَّالِحِينَ ﴿٥٠﴾ وَإِنْ يَكَادُ
 الَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا لَيُزْلِقُونَكَ بِأَبْصَارِهِمْ لَمَّا سَمِعُوا الذِّكْرَ وَيَقُولُونَ إِنَّهُ
 لَمَجْنُونٌ ﴿٥١﴾ وَمَا هُوَ إِلَّا ذِكْرٌ لِلْعَالَمِينَ ﴿٥٢﴾

Nūn, by the pen and what they write, [1] with the grace of your Lord, you are not insane. [2] And you will definitely have a reward that will never end. [3] And you are surely on exalted quality of character. [4] So, you will see, and they will see [5] which of you is demented. [6] Surely your Lord knows best who has strayed from his way, and He is well-aware of those who are on the right path. [7] So, do not obey those who reject (the true faith.) [8] They wish that you become flexible (in your faith), and they will become flexible (in their hostile attitude.) [9] And do not obey any contemptible one who swears much, [10] a slanderer who goes about with calumnies, [11] one who prevents good, (and who is) transgressor, sinful, [12] harsh, (and) after all that, notorious, [13] (do not obey such a person merely) because he is a man of wealth and sons. [14] When Our verses are recited to him, he says, "(These are) the tales of the ancient." [15] We will soon brand him on the snout. [16] We have tested them as We had tested the Owners of the Garden, when they had sworn an oath that they would pluck its fruits on the next morning, [17] and did not make any exception (by saying '*insha'allah*'). [18] Then, there whirled around it a whirl (of calamity) from your Lord, while they were asleep. [19] Thus, on the next morning, it was like a harvested field. [20] So, they called out each other as the morning broke, [21] saying, "Set out early, if you are going to pluck (the fruits)." [22] So they set out while they were whispering to each other, [23] saying, "Let no poor man enter into it upon you today." [24] And in early hours they rushed quickly, while they were (assuming themselves) powerful (to pluck the fruits and prevent the poor.) [25] But when they saw it (the place of the ruined garden), they said, "We have missed the way." [26] (Then, once they realized that the garden is the same, but it has been destroyed, they said,) "No, but we are deprived (of the fruits)." [27] Said he who was the best among them, "Did I not say to you, 'Why do you not pronounce *tasbiḥ* (Allah's purity)?" [28] They said, "We pronounce the purity of our Lord. No doubt, we were wrongdoers." [29] Then, (at the beginning,) they started reproaching one another; [30] (and at last,) they said, "Woe to us! In fact, we (all) were outrageous. [31] We hope that our Lord will give us in exchange something better than this. Truly we turn to Allah." [32]

In this way the punishment comes. And, of course, the

punishment of the Hereafter is even greater, if they but realize! [33] Surely, for the God-fearing are the gardens of bliss. [34] Otherwise, shall We make the obedient like the sinners? [35] What has happened to you? How do you judge? [36] Do you have a book in which you read [37] that for you there is what you choose? [38] Or do you have oaths sworn by Us, remaining effective up to the Day of Judgment, that you will get what you decide? [39] Ask them which of them stands surety for that. [40] Or do they have associate-gods (who have guaranteed safety for them? Then, let them bring their associate-gods, if they are true, [41] on the Day when the Shin will be exposed,¹ and they will be called upon to prostrate themselves, but they will not be able to. [42] With their eyes downcast, they will be enveloped by ignominy. And they used to be called upon to prostrate when they were healthy (but they did not.) [43]

So, leave Me alone with those who reject this discourse. We will draw them on little by little (towards Hell) from a way they do not know. [44] And I give them respite. Indeed, My plan is firm. [45] Is it that you ask them for a fee, due to which they are burdened with debt? [46] Or do they have the (knowledge of the) Unseen, and they write it down? [47]

So, remain patient with your Lord's judgment, and be not like the Man of the Fish,² he cried out while he was

- (1). This is the literal translation of the Qur'anic phrase used here. The exegetes have explained it in two different ways. Some of them are of the view that, according to the Arabic usage, 'exposure of the shin' is an idiomatic expression for a severe state of distress. When a person is confronted with such a distress, he normally lays his shins bare. Therefore, exposure of the shin has been taken as indicative of such a state. Given this interpretation, the verse means that on the day when the disbelievers will face the severe distress, they will be called upon to prostrate themselves, but they will not be able to do so, because their backs will be made flat, with no elasticity to bow down. Some other commentators, however, take the phrase in its literal sense. They say that the 'Shin' referred to here is the Shin of Allah Ta'ala, which is one of His attributes, the exact nature of which is neither known to anybody, nor discoverable in this world. (But obviously, it is not like the shins of human beings). According to this interpretation, the verse means that, at some stage on the Day of Judgment, Allah Ta'ala will expose this attribute of His which is called 'Shin', and they will be called upon to prostrate before it. This interpretation is supported by an authentic *hadith* reported by Bukhari and Muslim.
- (2). It refers to Sayyidnā Yūnus عليه السلام who was devoured by a fish after he left his nation. Full description of the event has been given in Surah Yūnus.

in anguish. [48] Had not a favour from His Lord come to his help, he would have been cast in the wilderness in a reproachable state. ³ [49] Then his Lord chose him, and made him one of the righteous. [50]

And indeed the disbelievers seem to trip you up with their glances ⁴ when they hear the Reminder, and say, "He is a madman indeed." [51] And it is nothing else but a Reminder for all the worlds. [52]

Commentary

Linkage of Sūrahs

The preceding Sūrah dealt with the existence of Allah, His Oneness, and His knowledge and power, and adduced, as a positive proof of these attributes, was the fact that Allah is the Creator of death and life, and of the entire universe through whose component parts there runs the beautiful order that pervades the cosmos. He has created man to serve a sublime object and to achieve a noble goal. But man in his ingratitude has always rejected the Divine Message and consequently has been incurring Divine scourge. This is mentioned, in Sūrah Al-Mulk, with particular reference to the pagans of Makkah. The present Sūrah deals with the truth of the Holy Prophet's ﷺ claim, and gives sound and solid proof of it. Thus it rebuts the criticisms and taunts of the pagans against the Holy Prophet ﷺ. Their first criticism was that he is [God forbid!] insane whereas he was perfectly sane person, an embodiment of knowledge and a paragon of virtues. Another reason why they probably called him insane is that whenever an installment of revelation descended upon the Holy Prophet ﷺ, a physical change came over him. For instance the

- (3). According to the explanation given to this verse by Maulana Ashraf Ali Thanawi, 'Favour from His Lord' means the acceptance of his repentance, and 'wilderness' refers to the place where he was thrown by the fish. If this verse is read in juxtaposition with Verses 143,144 of Sūrah As-Şaffāt, the sense appears to be that if Yūnus ؑ had not offered *tasbiḥ* and *taubah*, he would have remained in the belly of the fish for good, and if he had repented, but was not favoured by Allah with the acceptance of his *taubah*, he would have been cast by the fish into the wilderness, due to his repentance, but in a reproachable state. However, since Allah favoured him with accepting his *taubah*, he was no more reproachable. Some other scholars, however, suggest that 'wilderness' in this verse refers to the plain of Ḥashr, and the verse means that if Allah had not accepted his *taubah*, he would have been cast into the plain of Hashr in a reproachable state.
- (4). It means that they glare at you with such a hatred and anger as if they were to make you slip from your standpoint due to their aversion.

colour of his face would change and become red, or he would sometimes snore or he would at other times appear to be in grief, or there were times when he would hang his head down. When any of these states was over, he would recite the revealed verses to the people. This matter was beyond the understanding and perception of the pagans. Therefore, they regarded this experience of receiving revelation as insanity. Or they called him insane presumably because he put forward to his people and to the whole world that there is no object worthy of worship except Allah. He put it to them that their self-carved idols cannot be gods because they are insensate and lacking knowledge; and they lack the ability to benefit or harm anyone. His voice of Truth sounded alone yet with this lone voice of Truth without any apparent means and support, he stood unwaveringly against the whole world. People without any insight or foresight did not think that it was possible for him to achieve his goal and they called it insanity. Some called him insane for the sake of calling him insane, without any reason. Having no excuse to refute the teachings of Allah's Messenger, all the pagans could do was to dub him insane. The initial verses of Sūrah Al-Qalam refute under emphatic oath their false charges.

ن وَالْقَلَمِ وَمَا يَسْطُرُونَ. مَا أَنْتَ بِمَجْنُونٍ (Nūn, by the pen and what they write, with the grace of your Lord, you are not insane....68:2). The letter Nūn is one of the isolated letters that have been revealed at the beginning of many Sūrahs. They are the secret signs and symbols and mysteries of Allah. Allah alone knows their hidden meaning, or Allah made their mysterious meanings known to His Messenger. The Ummah is not permitted to investigate the hidden meaning of such isolated letters.

Pen and its Significance

In the phrase *wal-qalami*, the *waw* is the particle of oath [translated here as 'by the pen']. 'Qalam' refers to 'pen', and there are three types of pen: [1] the pen of destinies; [2] the pen of angels; and [3] the pen of human beings. It could refer to any or all of these types of pen. A pen is an object that is used for writing anything [as is the view of Abū Ḥatīm Al-Bustī]. According to Sayyidnā Ibn 'Abbās رضي الله عنه, it specifically refers to the pen of destinies. Sayyidnā 'Ubādah Ibn Ṣāmit رضي الله عنه narrates regarding the pen of destinies that the Messenger of Allah ﷺ said: "The first thing Allah created was the pen, and He told it to write, and when it asked Him what it should write, He told it to write what was predestined, so it wrote

what would take place to all eternity." [Transmitted by At-Tirmidhī, saying that this is a Tradition whose chain of narrators is *gharīb*]. Sayyidnā ‘Abdullāh Ibn ‘Umar رضي الله عنه narrated that the Messenger of Allah ﷺ said: "Allah recorded the destiny of all creatures 50000 years before creating the heavens and the earth." [Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim]. Qatādah رحمه الله تعالى says that pen is a great gift of Allah that He has endowed upon His servants. Some scholars say that Allah first created the pen, and that was the pen of decrees which recorded the destinies of the entire universe and all the creatures. Then He created the second pen that is used by the inhabitants of the earth. The second pen is referred to in Sūrah Iqra’ in verse [96:4], thus: **عَلَّمَ بِالْقَلَمِ** '{He who} taught by the pen'. And Allah knows best!

If *qalam* 'pen' in the verse under comment refers to the pen of destinies, its greatness and its superiority over everything is quite obvious and swearing by it is quite understandable. If it is taken to refer to all pens in general, including the pen of destinies, the pen of angels, and also the pen of human beings, swearing an oath by it is apt because all great tasks are accomplished by pen. In the conquests of territories, pen play a mighty role: 'The pen is mightier than the sword' goes the famous saying. Abū Ḥātim Al-Bustī has encapsulated this idea in two short verses:

إذا أقسم الأبطال يوماً بسيفهم وعُدّوه ممّا يكسب المعجذ والكرم

When the brave people swear by their sword some day,
And count it among things that give honour and veneration to men,

كفى قلم الكتاب عزّاً ورفعة.....مدى الدهر إن الله أقسم بالقلم

The writers' pen is sufficient for their honour and superiority
For all times to come, because Allah has sworn oath by the pen

In any case, it is immaterial whether the pen in the verse refers to the pen of destinies or it refers to the pen of creation in general. Then it swears an oath by **مَا يَسْطُرُونَ** 'what they write [1]'.
[1] **مَا يَسْطُرُونَ**

In other words, swearing an oath by what the pens have written or what they will record in the future, Allah refutes the unbelievers' false charge of madness that they made against the Holy Prophet ﷺ, thus:

مَا أَنْتَ بِنِعْمَةِ رَبِّكَ بِمَجْنُونٍ (with the grace of your Lord, you are not insane....68:2). The verse contains the phrase **بِنِعْمَةِ رَبِّكَ** (with the grace of your Lord....68:2). It states not only the claim, but also evidence to support

and substantiate the statement of claim. [See special note below.] Man is required to turn the pages of history, and he will realize that a person as great as the Messenger of Allah ﷺ, upon whom Allah has conferred great blessings and grace, cannot be insane. Calling such a sane person insane is itself insanity

Special Note

Scholars have explained the Qur'ānic concept of 'oath': Wherever Allah has sworn an oath by an object or a phenomenon, its subject has been cited as evidence or testimony to support and substantiate the claim. Here the phrase مَا يَسْطُرُونَ 'what they write [1]'. Is the proof of the claim, that is, world history has been cited as testimony for critics to look into the pages of history, if they can ever find a person of such lofty calibre as the Messenger of Allah ﷺ, with high morals insane. He takes care of other people's sanity. The next verse reinforces the subject.

وَإِنَّ لَكَ لَأَجْرًا غَيْرَ مَمْنُونٍ (And you will definitely have a reward that will never end....68:3). The verse exposes the absurdity of the charge of madness. It purports to say that the actions of a madman produce no useful result, but the Holy Prophet ﷺ will eminently succeed in fulfilling the object of his Divine mission, and in bringing about a wonderful revolution in the lives of his degenerate and demented people. This is the significance of the words in the verse 'and for you is a reward that will never end.' No insane person is ever rewarded for his actions. The next verse constitutes a further eloquent comment on the charge of insanity imputed to the Holy Prophet ﷺ, thus:

وَإِنَّكَ لَعَلَىٰ خُلُقٍ عَظِيمٍ (And you are surely on exalted quality of character.....68:4). In this verse, the demented people are invited to think carefully about the lofty morals of the Holy Prophet ﷺ.

The Holy Prophet's ﷺ Exalted Quality of Character

Sayyidnā Ibn 'Abbās ؓ has said that 'exalted quality of character' signifies a 'great religion, and it is Islam, a religion dearest to Allah'. Sayyidah 'Ā'ishah رضى الله عنها was asked about the Holy Prophet's ﷺ character. She replied: "The Holy Prophet's ﷺ character was the Qur'ān itself". In other words, he is the living example of the Qur'ān that teaches high morals. Sayyidnā 'Alī ؓ said that 'exalted quality of character' signifies the 'good manners which the Qur'ān has taught'. All these

interpretations have almost the same significance. That is to say, not only that the Holy Prophet ﷺ is not an insane person, but he is the sublime and noblest of men possessing in full measure all the moral excellence that combine to make their possessor a perfect image of his Creator. The Holy Prophet's ﷺ humanity was of the most perfect character. He was a complete embodiment of all good moral qualities that a man is capable of possessing. The Holy Prophet ﷺ himself said:

بعثت لاتمم مكارم الاخلاق

"I have only been sent to perfect noble character/conduct." [Abū Ḥayyān].

Sayyidnā Anas رضي الله عنه said:

"I served Allah's Messenger for ten years, and he never said a word of displeasure to me, nor did he ever say to me concerning something I had done: 'Why did you do that?' And he never said to me concerning what I had not done: 'Why did you not do this?'" [Bukhārī and Muslim].

Obviously, a ten-year period is a long time during which some unpleasant or objectionable thing might have happened.

Sayyidnā Anas رضي الله عنه said:

"As a result of the Holy Prophet's رضي الله عنه noble character, any slave-girl of Madīnah would hold his hand and take him wherever she would like to."

Sayyidah 'Ā'ishah رضي الله عنها said: "Allah's Messenger never struck anyone with his hands except when he was fighting in *jihād* in the cause of Allah." It is confirmed that when he fought *jihād* in the cause of Allah, he killed unbelievers. Otherwise he did not hit any servant, nor any woman. He would never take revenge for any harm or mistake done. He would only implement *Shar'ī* punishment on those who violated Allah's laws. [Transmitted by Muslim].

Sayyidnā Jabir رضي الله عنه says that the Messenger of Allah رضي الله عنه was never asked for anything for which he said 'No'. [Bukhārī and Muslim].

Sayyidah 'Ā'ishah رضي الله عنها said:

"Allah's Messenger was never vulgar, never pretended to be vulgar and he never shouted in the marketplaces. He never

responded to evil by evil, but always pardoned and overlooked."

Sayyidnā Abū-ḍ-Ḍardā' رضي الله عنه narrates that Allah's Messenger ﷺ said:

"Noble character will be the heaviest thing on a Muslim's scale of good deeds on the Day of Resurrection. Allah detests the rude and foul-mouthed person." [Transmitted by Tirmidhī, grading it as a Tradition which is 'ḥasan'].

Sayyidah 'Ā'ishah رضي الله عنها narrates that Allah's Messenger ﷺ said:

"Indeed by virtue of good character, a believer can attain the status of votaries who spend their nights in worship and their days in fasting." [Abū Dāwūd].

Sayyidnā Mu'ādh Ibn Jabal رضي الله عنه narrates that when he placed his foot into the stirrup of his mount, as he was departing for Yemen as the governor of that province, Allah's Messenger ﷺ advised him:

يَا مَعَاذَ أَحْسَنِ خُلُقِكَ لِلنَّاسِ

"O Mu'ādh, display your best character with people."
[Transmitted by Mālik].

All narratives cited here have been adopted from Tafsīr Maḥzarī.

فَسَتُبْصِرُ وَيُبْصِرُونَ. بَايِكُمْ الْمَفْتُونِ (So, you will see, and they will see which of you is demented....68:5-6). The word *maftūn*, in this context, means 'demented'. In the preceding verses, the Holy Prophet ﷺ was accused of being an insane and demented. This verse turns tables upon the accusers of the Holy Prophet ﷺ, and making a prophecy, tells them in challenging words that time will show whether it was he or they who suffered from insanity, or whether his claim to be Allah's Messenger was the outpouring of heated brain, or whether they themselves were so demented as not to read the signs of time, and thus refuse to believe in him. These were the unfortunate, wretched ones who did not see the light of Truth and were thus disgraced and defeated in this world. But, on the other hand, there were thousands of other lucky ones who, at first did not see the light of Truth and denounced him as demented, soon saw the light and embraced the Faith of Islam. They took the love and obedience of the Holy Prophet ﷺ as the capital asset of success, prosperity and happiness.

وَدُّوا لَوْ تُدْهِنُ فَيُدْهِنُونَ. فَلَا تَطِعِ الْمُكَذِّبِينَ. (So, do not obey those who reject [the true faith]. They wish that you become flexible [in your faith], and they

will become flexible [in their hostile attitude.]...68:8-9]. The interpretation of this verse as adopted in this translation is based on the interpretation of Sayyidnā Ibn ‘Abbās رضي الله عنه as reported by Qurṭubī.

Ruling

This verse indicates that any such compromise with the unbelievers is tantamount to *mudāhanah fid-dīn*, flexibility in religion, and this is forbidden. [Maḏharī]. Such a pact of leniency in matters of religion is not permissible, unless compelled by necessity.

وَلَا تُطِيعُ كُلَّ حَلَّافٍ مَّهِينٍ ﴿١٠﴾ هَمَّازٍ مَّشَاءٍ بِنَمِيمٍ ﴿١١﴾ مَنَاعٍ لِلْخَيْرِ مُعْتَدٍ أَلِيمٍ
﴿١٢﴾ عُتْلٍ بَعْدَ ذَلِكَ زَنِيمٍ ﴿١٣﴾

(And do not obey any contemptible one who swears much, a slanderer who goes about with calumnies, one who prevents good, [and who is] transgressor, sinful, harsh, [and] after all that, notorious,...68:10-13)

The word *zanīm* refers to 'a person whose legitimate birth from a father is not proved'. The person referred to in this verse was of doubtful birth or his lineage was uncertain.

The preceding verse prohibited any compromise with the unbelievers in general in matters of religion. The current verse prohibits specifically yielding to such mean leader of falsehood as Walīd Ibn Mughīrah, who possessed the base characteristics as listed in verses [10] to [13], the worst mischief-maker. [As transmitted by Ibn Jarīr on the authority of Ibn ‘Abbās رضي الله عنه. Having described this person's bad manners and his arrogance in several verses that follow, verse [16] says:

سَنَسِمْهُ عَلَى الْخُرْطُومِ (We will soon brand him on the snout...68:16). That is, as, disbelievers, out of pride and false sense of power rejected the Divine Message in this world, Allah will disgrace and humiliate them on the Day of Resurrection so that the earlier and later generations will be able to see it. His nose has been described by way of reproach as *khurṭūm* (snout). This refers specifically to the long nose of a pig or a trunk of an elephant.

إِنَّا بَلَوْنَهُمْ كَمَا بَلَوْنَا أَصْحَابَ الْجَنَّةِ (We have tested them as We had tested the Owners of the Garden....68:17). The preceding verses rebutted the criticisms of pagan Arabs levelled against Allah's Messenger ﷺ and gave reasons why the charges are not only unfounded, but also absurd. The

present set of verses mentions a story of the past and the unbelievers of Makkah are threatened with punishment. 'Testing them' could refer to the forthcoming story, in which the owners of a garden were blessed with Divine favours, but they behaved ungratefully. As a result, a punishment came upon them and the favours were destroyed. The greatest Divine favour upon the Makkans was the advent of the Holy Messenger ﷺ. Besides, their businesses flourished and they prospered. This was a test for them to see whether they would behave gratefully to Allah and believe in Him and in His Messenger ﷺ, or whether they would obstinately persist in disbelief. In the other case, they should draw lessons from the story of the owners of the orchard, lest they be visited by a similar punishment on account of ingratitude. This interpretation would apply even in the case where these verses are taken as Makkī, but most commentators take them to be Madanī. The 'test' referred to here is the terrible famine that held Makkah in its grip, as a result of the Holy Prophet's ﷺ prayer against them, for several years during which time people died of hunger and starvation, they were forced to eat carrion and leaves of trees till the Makkans begged the Holy Prophet ﷺ to pray for their deliverance from the scourge. This incident took place after the migration.

The Story of the Owners of a Garden

Some elders, such as Sayyidnā Ibn 'Abbās ؓ, mentioned that this orchard was in Yemen. According to one version of Sayyidnā Sa'īd Ibn Jubair's narration, it was about six miles away from Ṣan'ā', the famous capital city of Yemen. Other scholars think that it was in Ethiopia [formerly known as Abyssinia] [Ibn Kathīr]. They were from amongst the People of the Book. This incident took place a while after the Ascension of Sayyidnā 'Īsā ؑ. [Qurṭubī].

They are referred to as the 'Owners of the Garden' in the above verse. The description of the story given in the verses indicates that they did not only have a garden, but they also had large tracts of land which they cultivated and had fields of crops. Possibly, side by side with the orchard there were tracts of cultivated land and fields of crops in between the trees. However, they were called the owners of the garden on account of the popularity of the garden. The incident is reported according to the narration of Muḥammad Ibn Marwān on the authority of Sayyidnā Ibn

'Abbās رضي الله عنه as follows: There was a garden about two *farsakhs* (six miles) away from Ṣan'a' of Yemen. Its name was *Ḍarawān*. This garden was set up by a pious and righteous person. His practice was to pick the fruits or harvest the crops with sickle. He would give some of the crop to the poor and indigent who gathered grains for themselves and did their living.

Likewise, when the crop was thrashed, and the grain separated from the chaff, he would leave the grain for the poor. So also when fruits were picked from the trees of the orchard, some fruits would fall down, and he would leave them for the indigent. For this reason, the poor always gathered at the orchard at the time of picking the fruit, and separating the grain from the chaff. When the righteous person passed away, he had three sons who inherited the orchard and crop-fields. They held a family meeting and discussed that their family has grown large, and the produce of the orchard and land is not sufficient for them. Therefore, it is no longer possible for them to spare any fruit or grain for the poor. According to other narratives, these boys, like other youngsters, felt that their father was a fool to give so much of fruits and grains to them. They thought it was necessary to put a stop to this. The rest of the story is told in the following verses of the Qur'an.

إِذْ أَقْسَمُوا لَيَصْرِمُنَّهَا مُصْبِحِينَ. وَلَا يَسْتَنْوُونَ (...when they had sworn an oath that they would pluck its fruits on the next morning, and did not make any exception (by saying '*inshā'allah*').... 68:17-18). In other words, they swore that they would harvest very early in the morning and return with it before the throng of poor people could arrive at the garden. They had so much of confidence in their plan that they did not say the redeeming words 'If Allah wills' whereas it is *sunnah* to say '*inshā'allah*' when one mentions that one will do a particular work tomorrow.

وَلَا يَسْتَنْوُونَ (and did not make any exception (by saying '*inshā'allah*'). [68:18]). The word *isthisnā'* in the original Arabic means 'to make an exception by saying "*inshā'allah*". However, some scholars interpret this word, in this context, to mean that 'they would devour the entire harvest themselves, with no exception for the poor. [Maḏharī].

فَطَافَ عَلَيْهَا طَائِفٌ مِّن رَّبِّكَ (Then, there whirled around it a whirl (of calamity) from your Lord, while they were asleep....68:19). The word 'whirl' refers to 'a whirl of calamity' as a result of which Divine

punishment overtook the garden in a sudden and swift sweep. Some narratives report that it was a fire which burnt every standing crop, and reduced it to black ashes.

وَهُمْ نَائِمُونَ (...while they were asleep.... 68:19). In other words, the devastating disaster overtook the entire garden while its owners were asleep.

فَاصْبَحَتْ كَالصَّرِيمِ (Thus, on the next morning, it was like a harvested field....68:20). The word *ṣarm* means 'to harvest or to collect a crop from the fields'. The word *ṣarīm* in the context of the verse is used in the sense of *masrūm* or *maqṭū'*, meaning 'harvested or cut'. This signifies that the fire burnt the field and stripped it bare. The word *ṣarīm* also means 'night'. From this point of view, the verse signifies 'the field became burnt up and black like night'. [Mazharī].

فَتَنَادَوْا مُصْبِحِينَ (So, they called out each other as the morning broke 68:21). This means that they starting waking up each other in the early morning that they should set out early if they wanted to harvest.

وَهُمْ يَتَخَفَتُونَ (...while they were whispering to each other ... 68:23). They were speaking in a low voice, lest a poor man should hear their talk and accompany them.

وَعَدَوْا عَلَىٰ حَرْدٍ قَادِرِينَ And in early hours of the day they rushed quickly, while they were (assuming themselves) powerful (to pluck the fruits and prevent the poor.) [68:25]'. The word *ḥard* means 'to prevent' and 'to express anger'.⁵ In other words, they thought they had the power to pick the fruit for themselves and prevent the poor people from having a share in it, and even if they do come to the garden, the owners of the garden decided to chase them out.

فَلَمَّا رَأَوْهَا قَالُوا إِنَّا لَضَالُونَ (But when they saw it [the place of the ruined garden], they said, "We have missed the way."...68:26). In other words, when they did not find their garden on that spot, they first thought that they must have lost their way and gone to the wrong place. But when they saw the surroundings, they realized that it was the right place they have gone to, but the garden had been burnt up and destroyed. So, they

(5). This word also means 'to rush quickly'. This meaning of the word has been adopted in the translation of the text. (Muhammad Taqi Usmani)

exclaimed: *بَلْ نَحْنُ مَحْرُومُونَ* "No, but we are deprived [of the fruits]....68:27)

قَالَ أَوْسَطُهُمْ أَلَمْ أَقُلْ لَكُمْ لَوْلَا تَسْبِيحُونَ (Said he who was the best among them, "Did I not say to you, 'Why do you not pronounce *tasbīḥ* (Allah's purity)?"....68:28). The middle brother was the best of them. He was righteous like his father. It used to please him to spend in the cause of Allah. He was not niggardly or stingy like the other brothers. He had advised them to recite *tasbīḥ* which, literally, means to pronounce Allah's purity. He told them that they were withholding the share of the poor with the fear that their fruit will be depleted and will not be replenished by Allah, if they gave the poor their share. He told them that Allah is pure from such pettiness. Instead, those who spend in the way of Allah, He will not only make their wealth full again or replace what they have spent, but also will give them over and above what they have spent. [Mazhari].

قَالُوا سُبْحَانَ رَبِّنَا إِنَّا كُنَّا ظَالِمِينَ (They said, "We pronounce the purity of our Lord. No doubt, we were wrongdoers.".... 68:29). Neither of the brothers had paid heed to this brother's advice at that point. But when the damage was done, they admitted that Allah is Pure, Free from any qualities of weaknesses and shortcomings, and that they were the wrongdoers, in that they were unjust to the poor intending to deprive them of their share and devour it themselves.

Warning

Although the best of the three brothers offered the right advice, he joined the other brothers in following their wrong opinion. So he suffered the same loss. This indicates that anyone who prevents other people from committing sins but does not abstain from them himself and joins them in doing the wrong acts, he will suffer the same fate as the others.

فَأَقْبَلَ بَعْضُهُمْ عَلَى بَعْضٍ يَتَلَوْمُونَ (Then, (at the beginning,) they started reproaching one another;..... 68:30). That is to say, at the beginning they made admission of guilt, but then they turned to face each other in mutual accusation, blaming each other for the punishment that visited them, whereas the crime was not committed by only a single person from among them, but it was committed jointly by all or most of them.

A note of caution

A common misdeed, in our days, is that when a calamity befalls a

group of people due to their collective conduct, an additional scourge that befalls them is that, (instead of reforming themselves,) they start wasting their time in accusing each other.

فَالُوا يَوْمَئِذٍ أَنَّا كُنَّا ظٰغِبِينَ ([and at last,] they said, "Woe to us! In fact, we [all] were outrageous....68:31). At the beginning, they accused one another of the sin. Then when they considered the matter carefully, they admitted that they were all on the wrong. As a result, they lamented and admitted their guilt that amounted to repentance. On the basis of this repentance they hoped that Allah will give them in exchange a garden better than the one destroyed.

Imām Baghawī reports from Sayyidnā ‘Abdullāh Ibn Mas‘ūd ؓ that, according to his information, when these brothers repented truly, Allah blessed them with a better vineyard that bore such large bunches of grapes that a single bunch could be loaded on a mule. [Maḏharī].

كَذٰلِكَ الْعٰدَابُ (In this way the punishment comes. And, of course, the punishment of the Hereafter is even greater, if they but realize!....68:33). After a brief reference to the famine faced by the Makkans and a detailed account of the People of the Garden whose garden was burnt as a punishment, the present verse sets down a general rule. When a Divine punishment visits, it visits in this way, and this kind of punishment in the mortal world does not serve as an expiation for the punishment in the Hereafter. The punishment of the Hereafter is greater and more severe.

The following verses give a description of the reward of the righteous, followed by refutation of another false claim of the pagans of Makkah. They denied that Resurrection will ever occur. They thought the story of Resurrection and accountability is fiction. Even if that does happen, they thought, they will get the same type of blessings and wealth as they have in this world. Several verses respond to their false belief. In verse [35] Allah poses the rhetorical question to the disbelievers: 'Shall We make the obedient like the sinners?' [35] This is a strange sort of assertion for which they have no authority, nor proof nor any celestial book. Nor is there any promise from Allah that they will get the same type of blessings.

A Rational Proof of Resurrection

These verses give a solid proof to the necessity of the Day of Judgement, because accountability, rewarding the righteous and

punishing the evil are all rationally necessary. It is witnessed by every person in this mortal world, and no one can deny, that the wicked, the evil, the unjust, the thieves and the bandits generally lead a comfortable and enjoyable life in the mortal world. A thief or a bandit sometimes in one night gains so much of wealth that a righteous person might not gain as much in his entire life. The former has no fear of Allah or the Hereafter, nor does he have any sense of shame. He fulfills his selfish desires as he likes - by hook or by crook. The latter fears Allah, and if he does not have that, his sense of shame among his brotherhood overwhelms him. In short, in the mortal world the wicked and the evil ones seem to be successful, and the good people seem to be unsuccessful. If there does not arise an occasion where fair play and justice is established - where the good people would be rewarded and the evil ones would be punished? It would be meaningless to refer to evil as evil. There would be no reason to stop a person from fulfilling his selfish desires and doing the evil acts. On the other hand, justice will have no meaning or significance. How will the believers in God's existence respond to the following question: Where is God's justice?

One may argue that a criminal is apprehended, he is exposed to disgrace and is punished. This distinguishes the innocent persons from the evil ones right here in this world. Laws and statutes of a governments establish standards of justice and fair play. But this is incorrect, because it is not possible for a government to keep an eye on every one, everywhere and in all circumstances. Wherever it does happen, it is not an easy task to gather the necessary judicial evidence, so that the guilty person may be convicted and punished. And even if the judicial evidence could be gathered, there are several escape doors through which the guilty person could get away, such as force, bribery, intercession and pressure. If we review the punishment history of the present-day governments and courts, it would appear that nowadays only those people are punished who are fools, brainless and helpless or without support. They are not cunning enough to find a loophole in the legal system, or an escape route, nor do they have enough money to pay for bribery, nor do they have an influential person to back them or intercede on their behalf or they cannot use these things because of their foolishness. The rest of the criminals are moving freely.

This verse: *أَفَنَجْعَلُ الْمُسْلِمِينَ كَالْمُجْرِمِينَ* (Otherwise, shall We make the obedient like the sinners?... 68:35). Clarifies that it is rationally necessary that there should come a time when people will have to give account of their deeds, a place where the guilty ones will find no escape routes, an ideal world where there will be absolute justice and fair play, where good and evil will be clearly distinguished. If this is not the state of affairs in the Hereafter, then no evil should be evil, and no sin should be sin in this mortal world. Divine justice would thus be rendered meaningless.

Since it is established that Resurrection is a reality and inevitable, the reward of good deeds is a reality and the punishment of evil deeds is a reality, the verses that follow describe the horrors of the Day of Judgement and the punishment of the evil ones, including the description of the exposure of the Shin [*kashf-us-sāq*] in Verse 42 (the explanation of which may be seen in the foot-note given in the translation of that verse.)

فَدَرَبْنِيْ وَمَنْ يُكَدِّبْ بِهَذَا الْحَدِيثِ (So, leave Me alone with those who reject this discourse. We will draw them on little by little (towards Hell) from a way they do not know.... 68:44). Here the phrase 'So, leave me alone' in the original Arabic is an idiomatic expression which signifies 'Rely on Allah'. The disbelievers often demanded Divine punishment arguing that if they are really guilty in the sight of Allah, and if He has the power to punish, then why the punishment does not befall them forthwith. These were heart-rending demands on account of which the thought probably must have crossed the mind of the Holy Prophet ﷺ and he might have prayed to Allah to punish them sometime, in the hope that the rest of the people might draw lessons and amend their conduct. On that occasion, Allah revealed [in verse, 45] that He is the best aware of the wisdom behind His decisions. He does not punish them immediately, but He gives them respite to test them and to give them an opportunity to believe.

Towards the end, the story of Sayyidnā Yūnus عليه السلام is concisely told that when his people constantly demanded punishment, he became indignant and prayed for the punishment to be sent down. The signs of the punishment started appearing. Sayyidnā Yūnus عليه السلام left the place and transferred himself elsewhere. In the meantime the entire nation wept, wailed, sincerely repented and begged refuge from the Divine punishment. Allah pardoned them and took away the punishment. Sayyidnā Yūnus عليه السلام felt embarrassed and thought that if he goes back

to his people, they might think he was a liar. As a result, without the clear permission of Allah, he acted purely on his *ijtihad* [independent judgement] that he would not go back to his people. At this, Allah, in order to caution him, created a situation where he had to undertake sea voyage, and then was lowered into the sea where he was swallowed up by a fish. Being thus cautioned, Sayyidnā Yūnus عليه السلام sought the Divine pardon. Consequently, Allah once again opened the doors of the former blessings to be restored to him. Full description of the event has been given in Sūrah Yūnus (Verse 10:98) and other Sūrahs. The Holy Prophet ﷺ is comforted by this story not to be impressed by people's demands nor to be anxious to get them punished hastily. Allah's wisdom is profound and unfathomable. Allah alone knows what is in the best interests of the world. Allah should be trusted and relied on.

وَلَا تَكُنْ كَصَاحِبِ الْحُوتِ (So, remain patient with your Lord's judgment, and be not like the Man of the Fish...68:48). It refers to Sayyidnā Yūnus عليه السلام. He is named here as 'Man of Fish' because he was devoured by a fish and remained in its belly for some time.

وَأِنَّ يَكَادُ الَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا لَيُزِقُونَكَ بِأَبْصَارِهِمْ (And indeed the disbelievers seem to trip you up with their glances when they hear the Reminder, and say, "He is a madman indeed....68:51). The verb '*layuzliqūnaka*' is derived from *izlāq* which means 'to trip up or to cause someone to fall or make a mistake' [*Rāghib*]. The verse says to the Holy Prophet ﷺ that disbelievers cast angry looks at him that they might frighten him into giving up his mission or intimidate him into yielding to their pressure tactics. When they listen to Divine words, they call him a madman. But far from it, his teaching contains the quintessence of wisdom - the Qur'an puts it thus:

وَمَا هُوَ إِلَّا ذِكْرٌ لِلْعَالَمِينَ (And it is nothing else but a Reminder for all the worlds.... 68:52). Divine words are a Reminder and an admonition for the entire universe. The Reminder will lift the people from the lowest depths of degradation to the highest summits of greatness and glory. It would also cleanse them and free them from moral blemishes and raise their spiritual stature. Is it possible for an insane person to receive and deliver such a Sublime Divine Message? Can a Prophet of such a high caliber be called a madman? The earlier verses of this Sūrah rebutted the charge of insanity against the Holy Prophet ﷺ. Towards the end of the Sūrah, the same charge of lunacy is rebutted again in a different style.

Imām Baghawī رحمه الله تعالى and some other commentators have reported another event as background of this verse. The evil eye is a reality which causes loss, illness and destruction. Authentic Traditions report that it is a reality. The Arabs also believed that an evil eye is a reality. There was a person famous in Arabia to cast an evil eye on camels or animals to cause instant death or destruction. The pagans of Arabia were enemies of the Holy Prophet ﷺ and in every possible way they were after persecuting him and killing him. They left no stone unturned in harming him. They even contemplated afflicting him with an evil eye. They therefore decided to secure the services of the particular person who could effectively cast an evil eye. He was instructed to cast the evil eye on the Messenger of Allah ﷺ so that he would become ill. He exerted himself to the utmost, but to no avail. Allah protected him and he was unaffected. The verses were revealed in connection with this incident.

Special Note

Sayyidnā Ḥasan Baṣrī reports that if anyone is affected by the evil eye, these verses (51 & 52) may be recited and blown on the person: the ill effect will be dispelled.

Alhamdulillah
The Commentary on
Sūrah Al-Qalam
Ends here